

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time 2007

Fr. Bob VerEecke, S.J.

This past week the parish mourned the passing of two wonderful parishioners who were very active in the life of the parish when they were physically able. Both Reta Pratt and Eleanor Carlo lived their faith fully and shared their gifts as lectors, ministers. Eleanor also contributed her spiritual and artistic gifts as a leader of many programs that integrated art and spirituality. Her paintings of St Ignatius hang in the Friary Room (Ignatius w hair modeled after me must have been some time ago!) and another in the rectory. Next week the cover of the bulletin will have one of her paintings.

It was not too difficult to find words for a homily about these two women since their faith and zeal for the church was so tangible. Both give evidence of the rich reward that comes to someone who "for better or for worse" lives their faith fully with dedication and commitment to the Gospel. To find words that can do justice to the life of someone is always a challenge. With the billions of breath that a person has taken in her lifetime, with the countless hearbeats that have pulsed within her, how can anyone really capture the essence of another's life? It is certainly a bit easier if the person has been active in the life of the parish and is someone for whom the ritual and traditions of our Catholic Faith have had meaning throughout their lives. But only a bit easier. Preaching at funerals always runs the risk of trivializing a person's life and more trivializing the mystery of Death and Resurrection.

I think that is what we hear in today's gospel. The Sadducees trivialize the mystery of death and

resurrection with their logical but absurd question to Jesus. They are narrowly focused on the material, physical dimensions of life. There is no recognition of personhood in this hypothetical case of a woman who loses six husbands. There is no sense of loss, of burden for her. She really is only property in this world, not a person. And frankly Jesus' response which may be more Luke than Jesus can seem a bit trivial in its portrayal of an angelic heavenly life. What really matters comes in Jesus' final statement. God is a God of the living. Death is the pen-ultimate mystery. We stand before the reality of death in humility and in silence. There are no words to explain death or really console one who is living through the loss of someone whom they have loved.

The other night I had the opportunity to go to the Symphony to hear Mahler's 9th symphony. In it he powerfully and poignantly addresses the struggle between life and death. The first movement consists of an extended conflict between the elements of life and death. The work opens with a hesitant, syncopated motif, a depiction perhaps of an irregular heartbeat, which is to return at the height of the movement's development as a sudden **intrusion** of "death in the midst of life", announced by trombones and marked within the score "with the greatest force". 90 minutes later after the listener has been flooded with sound, harmonious and dissonant, the music disintegrates amid longer and longer pauses. As the Boston Globe reviewer says " At the very end, you couldn't tell exactly where the music stopped and the silence began. Whether or not the music of Mahler's 9th is your kind of music, there is nothing trivial about the composer's struggle to deal with the great themes of life and death.

As I listened to the Symphony, struggling to understand his musical ideas, I thought of another one of our parishioners who is in between the music of life and silence of death. Perhaps our eldest parishioner, 97 Alice Brennan is aware of time that is slipping away. She is reconciled to the reality that death may be "any day now". And this morning I heard that it is "any day now". But her life has been lived so fully, so faithfully that death itself must shrink back from the witness that her life has been as a wonderful human being and as a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Hers is the consolation that the God of Mercy offers in Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, all of us will stand before the great mystery of death "any day" now or years from now. We dare not trivialize the meaning of this awesome reality that robs us of the present moment, the being present to those we love in flesh and blood. Nor dare we trivialize the ultimate meaning of our lives that Christ gives us in his Resurrection. IF we live with the Lord, we will die with the lord, and we will know the power of his resurrection for all eternity.